DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 115 665 TM 004 935

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TITLE	Faculty Opinion Toward Publication of Student Ratings Results for Students. Report No. 76-1.
INSTITUTION	Washington Univ., Seattle. Educational Assessment Center.
REPORT NO	EAC-P-249
PUB DATE	Jul 75
NOTE	12p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS	College Students; College Teachers; Higher Education; Information Dissemination; Student Evaluation; *Student Publications; *Surveys; *Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Rating
IDENTIFIERS	Instructional Assessment System; University of Washington

ABSTRACT

A telephone survey of 97 faculty members at the University of Washington was conducted to determine attitudes toward publication of student ratings results. Eleven respondents were opposed to any form of publishing. Of the remaining, 95 percent approved of distribution to advisory offices, 71 percent approved of individualized student distribution, 60 percent approved of publication in the Time Schedule, and 53 percent approved of publication in the campus newspaper. A majority of faculty approved of presenting item means and norms along with response percentages. Finally, most faculty found the Instructional Assessment System useful in improving instructional effectiveness. The interview guide is included in the appendix. (Author/DEP)

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ED115665

Educational Assessment Center

University of Washington

July 1975

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Faculty Opinion toward Publication of Student Ratings Results for Students

Gerald M. Gillmore and Marsali Hansen

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TM 004 935

Educational Assessment Center Project. 249

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A feature of the University of Washington Instructional Assessment System, developed for the collection and dissemination of student ratings information, is the presence of items for student use in course selection (Gillmore, Note 1). Thus far, results of ratings of specific classes have been communicated to students via published booklets (Gillmore, Note 2, Note 3). A copy of the booklet is sent to all faculty and staff at the University of Washington who are on the official Adivisng List. Copies are also permanently affixed in areas of high student use (e.g., the student union and course registration areas). Providing a booklet to each student each term has not been employed because of the prohibitive expense of so doing.

In a survey of students conducted during Winter Quarter, 1975, shortly after the first such publication, Hansen and Gillmore (Note 4) found that one-half of the sample of students polled were not aware that the publication existed, and only 29 percent had actually seen it. These data suggest that alternative means for disseminating the results of ratings to students might be sought. However, an additional consideration is important in addressing this problem.

At the University of Washington, no results from the Instructional Assessment System are made public without the concurrence of the specific instructor whose class was rated. Thus if a method of dissemination is chosen which does not incur significant faculty approval, then fewer faculty will presumably agree to publish. This unfriendly implication is such to decrease the value of the published document, regardless of the form it takes.

It was the above considerations which led to the design of a study to assess faculty attitudes toward various means of publishing the results of ratings. Information was also sought pertaining to the information which should be contained, who should bear the cost, and the overall usefulness to instructors of the information provided by the system.

Method

Subjects

A sample of 200 individuals was randomly selected from a list of faculty who had had classes rated using the Instructional Assessment System during the preceding quarter (winter, 1975). This population was chosen to assure that respondents would have some involvement in the system.[1] Up to three attempts were made to contact each member of the sample by telephone at randomly selected times during a one week interval. If no contact was made after three attempts, the faculty member was excluded from the sample. This procedure resulted in a sample of 97 respondents.

Procedure

All interviews were conducted by the same person (Hansen). Respondents were asked a series of questions concerning the publication of rating results (see Appendix A for the instrument used by the interviewer). First, four specific suggestions for ways to publish were given, and respondents were asked to indicate how they personally would feel about having their results published each way, using the following scale: Yes; Probably; Probably Not; No. Those faculty who responded "no" to all four alternative methods were then asked if they were opposed to the publication of their own results in any manner and if they were opposed to the publication of results for everyone. Those who answered affirmatively to the former question were not asked additional "publication" questions.

Respondents were next reminded that data presently published are percentage distributions for each of the seven student-information items. They were then asked to give their opinions concerning the inclusion of the class means for each item and normative (comparative) information. Responses were recorded as follows: Yes, Probably Not, No.

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[1] The population consisted of those faculty with the following ranks: Professor, Associate Professor, Assistant Professor, and Lecturer.

The next question asked was who should be responsible for paying for the student publication. Nominees submitted to respondents for this honor were Advisory Offices, Central Administration, Student Organizations, and Individual Students.

Finally, all members of the sample were asked if they had found the new student rating forms useful. Response categories offered were: Very Much, Somewhat, A Little, and Not at All.

Results

Possible Bias in the Sample

Out of the original sample of 200 potential respondents carefully chosen by random selection, 97 were contacted. Of those contacted, none refused to complete the interview. Since three unsuccessful calls were placed to each non-respondent, the source of any systematic bias found in the final sample has to be in a differential amount of time spent within one's office. One could assume that, as a group, respondents spend more time in their office than non-respondents. A greater degree of student orientedness by the respondents might be suggested from this inferred difference in availability.

When making the calls, the interviewer did not know who, within the sample, had actually published during the preceding term. However, a check back after the survey was completed indicated that 65 percent of the 97 respondents had published results the preceding quarter as compared to 54 percent of those within the original sample of 200 who were not contacted. A chi square test for independence was applied to these data and the difference between the groups failed to reach significance ($\chi^2 = 2.31$, $df = 1$). This result offers no definitive evidence for a difference between the two groups but is somewhat suggestive of a possible bias in the respondents.

Complete Opposition to Publishing

Of the 97 respondents, eleven stated that they were completely opposed to publishing their own data, and, of these eleven, eight were opposed to publishing for everybody. The position taken by these faculty persons would seem to make any method or form chosen unacceptable to them; thus, their responses are not included in the data to be presented below, except for the last question.

Methods of Publication

The number and percentage of the reduced number of respondents for each publication method is presented in Table 1

Table 1

Responses to the Question: Which of the Following Ways Would You Find Publication Acceptable? (N = 86)

Method	Yes	Probably	Probably Not	No
Advising Offices				
Number	82	1	1	2
Percentage	95	1	1	2
Individualized Student Distribution				
Number	54	7	12	13
Percentage	63	8	14	15
The Time Schedule				
Number	45	7	14	20
Percentage	52	8	16	23
The Daily				
Number	40	5	15	26
Percentage	47	6	17	30

Clearly the most favorable method was distributing results to advising offices, with each subsequent method listed getting less support. However, for each of the proposed methods a majority of those interviewed responded favorably (combining "Yes" and "Probably"), although the majority favoring publishing in the Daily was very scant.

Publication of Additional Information

The number and percentage of the reduced sample of respondents who indicated their preference for including data beyond percentages within the publication is found in Table 2.

Table 2

Responses to the Question Concerning Publication of Additional Statistics (N = 86)

Statistic	Yes	Probably Not	No
Mean for each item			
Number	66	10	10
Percentage	77	12	12
Normative information			
Number	50	18	18
Percentage	58	21	21

The majority favor the inclusion of means for each item and inclusion of normative information, with the former getting greater support.

Responsibility for Funding the Publication

Not all respondents were willing to give an opinion as to who should fund the dissemination of student ratings results to students. Table 3 gives the number and percentage of those who did respond to each suggested source.

Table 3

Responses to the Question Concerning the Source of Funding

Source	Yes	No	Total Responding
Advisor offices			
Number	23	49	72
Percentage	32	68	
Central administration			
Number	33	40	73
Percentage	45	55	
Student organizations			
Number	30	43	73
Percentage	41	59	
Individual students			
Number	28	47	75
Percentage	37	63	

Central administration was the favored funding source, but even it was not chosen by a majority. In fact, all four sources received roughly equivalent numbers of approvals.

Usefulness of the New Forms

Each member of the sample was asked to judge how useful he/she found the new student rating forms for his/her instruction. The responses to this question are found in Table 4. Five individuals did not respond to this question.

Table 4

Responses to the Usefulness of the New Forms (N = 92)

	Very Much	Somewhat	A Little	Not at All
Number	45	18	18	11
Percentage	49	20	20	12

As can be seen from the table, almost 50% of the faculty found the forms very useful, and 88% found them of at least a little usefulness.

As an interesting side question, one might wonder if the eleven faculty persons who stated that they were against all forms of publication also found the new forms of little or no usefulness to themselves. Such was clearly not the case. Ten of the eleven responded to this question, and six of these judged that the new forms were very useful in their instruction. Two responded "a little" and the remaining two responded "not at all."

Discussion and Conclusions

The primary purpose of the survey was to ascertain attitudes of faculty toward certain methods of publishing student ratings results for student use. Clearly there was strong approval of distributing results to advising offices. The approval of other methods was less dramatic, with barely a majority approving of publication in the campus newspaper. However, a possibly more important finding is that there is not widespread dissatisfaction among those faculty members who conduct ratings

of their classes in having the results published. Only eleven percent disapproved of publication by any means. Even the fact that 53 percent responded "yes" or "probably" to the least favored method can be considered a favorable response since this fairly closely matches the percentage of instructors using the system who actually do have results published during a term.

Neither does there seem to be great opposition to publishing item means as well as response percentages (77% affirmative). However, the inclusion of norms would seem to present a less attractive option, with 58 percent responding affirmatively. But again, this is still above half the sample.

Questioning faculty about the source of funding did not prove very helpful since no strong opinion emerged on the matter. Probably, faculty are not in a good position to consider this question, nor is it of very much importance to them.

Finally, the small number of faculty indicating that the ratings were of no use in improving their teaching effectiveness is a very gratifying result. In fact many of these suggested that the student open-ended comments were useful even if the objective items were not. Thus, faculty apparently feel that student opinion as gathered by the Instructional Assessment System is helpful in improving their instruction and not just useful to have in the folder at promotion time.

Reference Notes

1. Gillmore, G. M. A brief description of the University of Washington Instructional Assessment System (EAC Report 276). Seattle: University of Washington, Educational Assessment Center, 1974.
2. Gillmore, G. M. Instructional Assessment System: Responses to items for student use, Autumn Quarter, 1974 (EAC Report). Seattle: University of Washington, Educational Assessment Center, 1974.
3. Gillmore, G. M. Instructional Assessment System: Student rating results, Winter Quarter 1975 (EAC Report). Seattle: University of Washington, Educational Assessment Center, 1975.
4. Hansen, M., & Gillmore, G. M. A survey of the availability and usage of published student ratings results (EAC Report 298). Seattle: University of Washington, Educational Assessment Center, 1974.

Appendix A

Form Used By Interviewer

Hello, I'm Marsali Hansen from the Educational Assessment Center and I'm calling about the publication of student rating results. As you probably know, this is the second quarter that publication of sections 16 through 22 have been made available for student course selection. However, since publication of the ratings is contingent upon faculty approval, we are attempting to determine the most acceptable method of publication by conducting a survey of faculty using the Forms. Your answers will be used for statistical purposes only and will not be tied to you personally in any way.

Which of the following ways would you find publication acceptable?

	Yes	Probably	Probably not	No
In the advising offices	☐	☐	☐	☐
For individualized student distribution	☐	☐	☐	☐
In the time schedule	☐	☐	☐	☐
In the Daily	☐	☐	☐	☐

If no to all of the above: are you completely opposed to publication for you?

☐ Yes ☐ No For everyone ☐ Yes ☐ No

If not do you have any suggestion of an acceptable method of publication?

Only percentage distributions are published at this time. How do you feel about the publication?

	Yes	Probably not	No
Of means for each item	☐	☐	☐
Comparative information norms	☐	☐	☐

In your opinion, who should be responsible for funding the publication?

	Yes	No
The advisory offices	☐	☐
The central administration	☐	☐
Student organizations	☐	☐
Individual students (sale)	☐	☐

One additional more general question:

Have you found the new forms useful in your instruction? Very much ☐

Somewhat ☐ A little ☐ Not at all ☐